



NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

GOVERNOR JANET NAPOLITANO
REMARKS, AS PREPARED

MAY 13, 2005
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY SKYDOME



Thank you President Haeger, distinguished faculty, Lumberjack friends and families, and the 2005 graduating class of Northern Arizona University. I'm proud to be here at NAU, and in Flagstaff.

You have done me a tremendous honor today, and I thank you for that, as well.

Much more than accepting this degree, though, I am proud to be here with you: today's graduates, and tomorrow's leaders. I know you have worked hard to earn your degrees.

I am also glad to be here with your families. They've supported you, and stood by you. Today is as meaningful for them as it is for you. I ask all of you to stand up and applaud those who've come to celebrate your big day.

Now, let me ask you something: Graduates, are you ready?

I'm serious! Are you ready??

I have no doubt that you're ready!

You're ready to be done with school, ready to enter careers and to make some money. Ready to pay back college loans and, for some of you, ready to continue your study, this time toward an advanced degree.

You're also ready for something else, and I suspect it's something you haven't had time to think about yet, but it is critically important.

You've been given a remarkable gift. It is a gift that truly – in reality – only a small percentage of our population enjoys. You have been given, and you have earned, a college education.

Because of that, your 'to-do' list is a little longer. You have a responsibility that's greater than you might imagine, because the Arizona you now enter, the "real world" you are now a part of, is far different than the one I entered, or the world your parents entered, or the world of even five years ago.

When I earned my Bachelor's degree in 1979, the Village People's "Y.M.C.A." was one of the top-10 songs, and "All That Jazz" won best picture at the Academy Awards. We used typewriters, not personal computers. We listened to 8-track tapes, not MP-3s. And things like 9/11 were beyond our farthest imagination.

Now, think about what has happened during the last five years you've been in college.

The human genome has now been mapped. We've landed on Mars and put a probe into orbit around Saturn. We have iPods and satellite radio. And, in our new economy,



business competition isn't just New York and L.A.; it's Bombay, Vancouver, Mexico City and Beijing.

And you are now in the driver's seat. As you leave today, and launch into the world, you have a great opportunity. You will make decisions that will help guide the lives of graduates who – 20 years from now – will sit where you are sitting.

You will be leaders of change in rapidly advancing society that, in just a few decades, has progressed from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, and now to the Innovation Age; a new era in which we seek to do more than share and acquire information via the Internet. In this era full of promise, we aim to take that information and develop all kinds of new technologies and new ways of thinking.

Your success in the Innovation Age will depend on your individual ability – and our collective ability to keep up with this rapid rate of change, and shape the world in which we live.

Arizona has a unique opportunity in the Innovation Age.

We're a young state, with a competitive spirit that fosters new ways of thinking.

Our population is young: children under five are the fastest growing demographic. And our state continues to grow.

And, our institutions are young. You can advance quickly in Arizona if you are willing to commit your time, your intellect and your energy. I came to Arizona in 1983 not knowing a soul. Now, I'm Governor! There are not many states where that can happen.

Graduates of NAU and the people of northern Arizona have a special understanding of at least two areas of change critical to our future. And that's why today, I challenge each of you live up to your promise and become a leader in improving the education of the next generation of Arizonans and in serving as stewards of our natural assets – our forests, our water and our air.

Every graduate here today, regardless of your major, can think of new ways to prepare future generations of Arizonans to better compete in the global marketplace. Every person in this hall can contribute to the task of updating our school system.

Think about this for a moment: Over the last 50 years, our economy has changed drastically. But our training hasn't. The school system I went through is essentially the same as the one you've just completed; it's the same as the one our kindergartners enter today.

This lack of progress has a sobering reality: by the time American students reach their senior year of high school, they are far behind their counterparts in other industrialized



nations in math and science – the two most critical areas we must build on in the Innovation Age.

Just a few months ago, America's foremost innovator – Bill Gates – gave a speech in which he said the system we use to teach our children is outdated. And he described America's high schools as "obsolete."

That's not the word most of us want to hear when it comes to describing our education system, but perhaps it's what we *need* to hear. Because unless we start to make some changes in how we prepare ourselves to compete with the rest of the world, the American worker will also become "obsolete."

The United States needs a new approach to education, and we need innovators to shape it.

Here in Arizona, we're making steps in the right direction.

In the last two years, we've opened the doors for thousands of children to attend full-day kindergarten because today's students need more quality time in the classroom, and a better foundation of reading and math before they enter the first grade. We've worked with school districts to move more than \$100 million from administrative overhead to activities in the classroom.

And, we've built more than \$560 million in new school buildings, so our students have a quality environment in which to learn.

Now we need to focus on the single most important element in raising the level of student achievement: the teacher in the classroom.

That's why I asked a veteran of the classroom – NAU's own President Haeger – to chair the Governor's Committee on Teacher Quality and Support. This committee of top-notch professionals will recommend new ways to boost teacher quality and pay, and will create a system of teacher professional development that continues throughout the careers of our state's educators.

For teachers, just like their students, learning, and learning how to teach in new ways, is a lifelong process.

Providing teachers with the tools and support they deserve will go a long way toward making Arizona's schools the very best in the nation.

That's good progress, but there is much more to do. And much of that work will fall on your shoulders.

You will need to fundamentally change our schools as time demands, to meet the needs of the Innovation Age so we can turn today's dreams into tomorrow's realities.



At the same time, we must all commit ourselves to better protect our environment. This is especially important in Arizona, where we value our beautiful forests, our open spaces and our desert vistas.

More and more people are making their homes in Arizona every day, and a large part of that has to do with our state's natural beauty.

But with this growth comes challenge. How can we be the worthy stewards of our water resources, and plan for Arizona's growth over the next 100 years? How can we best manage our forests to prevent devastating fires? What can we do to develop and promote new sources of clean energy?

Better yet, how will the world deal with these problems? Pollution runs much higher in other parts of the world, yet Americans do so little to help others keep their nations clean. Air and water pollution are major problems in many industrialized cities, and many communities lack basic water management infrastructure.

Arizonans can be innovators, and can lead the world in finding new solutions to these problems.

NAU is already playing a key role in solving one of these issues. Last year, I announced my plans to open a virtual water university that will serve as a super-center and clearinghouse of research and information from Arizona's three state universities.

There won't be a physical building for this university. It will be completely online, and will share with the world what Arizona's best scientists are learning about water management. Communities around Arizona, and around the globe, will be able to access this cutting-edge research so the entire world can better use and manage its water resources.

I hope some of you in this hall today play a role in the future of this endeavor.

And all of us can work together to resolve one of our nation's most serious situations by ending America's dependence on foreign oil. We can develop homegrown, and clean energy in its place.

Energy independence could fundamentally transform – for the better – America's role in the world. No longer would the United States ever be held hostage by an oil-producing country, or the high cost of a gallon of gas. And never again would some suspect our motive for engaging in war is to occupy oil fields.

The benefits to our homeland are equally as compelling. No longer would our children have to breathe in harmful pollution.

Arizona can – and should – lead the way.



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The sun shines in Arizona every day of the year, which puts us in the driver's seat to lead the world in advancing the capabilities and reach of clean solar power.

This graduating class has a special calling: to continue to reform America's schools to prepare our students to continue to lead the world, and innovate new solutions that will continue to keep our planet clean and safe. I believe in you and I believe in all that you can achieve in the New Arizona of the Innovation Age.

With that in mind, let me leave you with two more thoughts:

The first is from Harold McAlindon. He said, and I quote, “The world leaders in innovation and creativity will also be the world leaders in everything else.”

And, finally, from Alan Kay, one of the world’s top innovators in personal computing: “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

I wish you all the very best of luck and good fortune as you invent the world of tomorrow.

Thank you.